Horizons, 48, pp. 155–194. © College Theology Society, 2021
doi:10.1017/hor.2021.6

PEDAGOGICAL ROUNDTABLE

Teaching Antiracism

Recognizing that thousands of people of color have suffered the many brutalities of racism, the editorial staff of Horizons *marks the somber first anniversary of the tragic murder of George Floyd (May 25, 2020) with a pedagogical roundtable considering the possibility or impossibility of teaching antiracism in colleges and universities.*

Keywords: African American literature, racial justice, white supremacy, antiracism, antiracist pedagogy, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Black Catholics, settler colonialism, university, inclusion, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor

I. Pedagogy Toward Refusal

In the fall 2020 semester, a Black student had to drop my class and reduce their enrollment to part-time. The student exercised leadership within the student movements in Louisville for justice in the Breonna Taylor case. Due to COVID-19 the student's parent lost their capacity to work and lost their job. The student was forced to work several part-time jobs to take care of their family. In addition to the mounting responsibilities of family care, the stress and psychological pressure was immense. In the same semester, Black faculty on my campus took up a collection for a Black student who was having difficulty meeting basic needs while continuing to work and attend classes. How is it possible to express "Black Lives Matter" within the university setting when Black students are faced with such difficulties? I have had to confront several realities:

1. I teach students in the wake of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Jonathan Price, and in a moment of increasing visibility of openly violent white Christian nationalism.
2. In general, universities remain far from being antiracist. Universities were founded in racial exploitation and settler colonialism and continue to produce racial inequality.

Joseph S. Flipper is Associate Professor of Theology and Assistant Director of the Ethics and Social Justice Center at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. Among other publications, he is the author of Between Apocalypse and Eschaton: History and Eternity in Henri de Lubac *(Fortress, 2015). He was awarded a Fulbright to study Catholic social thought in Chile from 1920 to 1950.*

3. The university continues to shape people for an education in dispossession.
4. And an education in antiracism was happening primarily outside of the university setting.

This article suggests that an education that confronts racism in this moment must primarily take place outside the university or at its edges.[1]

Seeking Shelter

The deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Jonathan Price, and other Black people at the hands of police and nonpolice and the increased visibility of white Christian nationalism are not separate realities. They are both, quite simply, manifestations of the assumption that whites have the duty of surveillance and control over Black and brown bodies. Over the last several years, we have seen the increased visibility of militias, anti-immigrant groups, white identity associations, Western chauvinists, and other right-wing extremists concerned with demonstrating their right to violently assert control over public space, to determine which monuments stand, to determine law, and to guard the borders. This was essentially the message of the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol. Although some of these right-wing groups are anti-government, they abrogate to themselves the rights usually accorded to police to surveil and to discipline the movement of nonwhites by force and with arms. During the summer of 2020, armed members of militia groups patrolled our streets in what they described as supporting law enforcement against Black Lives Matter protestors. This violent (official and unofficial) policing is not restricted to the field of police work but has been seen to extend to all interactions in public space: Starbucks, bird sanctuaries, and schools.

The university offers little shelter from this policing, though it has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and online learning this past year. I have personally heard Black students, staff, and faculty describe how their presence in the university is questioned or their belonging is challenged. The popular #BlackInTheIvory Twitter hashtag highlights subtle and overt racism faced by Black people in higher education, including microaggressions that remind them they do not belong. Microaggressions are a means of policing a racially stratified social space. Koritha Mitchell notes the term "microaggression"—often minimized as a subtle, insignificant slight—is misleading.

[1] In this article, I am inspired by and specifically indebted to the work of Sandy Grande on pedagogy, refusal, and sustaining Indigenous education.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Instead, it is often a form of "know-your-place aggression" responding to the achievements of the recipient of the aggression.[2] Success by BIPOC prompts a racial retrenchment that seeks to put someone in their place. In other words, "know-your-place aggression" functions to reaffirm racial hierarchy and authority. Despite the attempts to present a face of multiculturalism, the university too remains a racially stratified (and sometimes hostile) environment. Many students with whom I speak recognize that the university does not offer reprieve from these forms of surveillance and discipline.

The University Cannot Be Antiracist

There is a chasm between those who believe antiracism can be advanced within the university and those who believe that the university is beyond redemption. Robin Kelley notes that many student activists, faculty, and staff working for antiracism and those who criticize them share a "fundamental belief that the university possesses a unique teleology: it is *supposed* to be an enlightened space free of bias and prejudice, but the pursuit of this promise is hindered by structural racism and patriarchy. Though adherents of this perspective differ in their assessments of the extent to which the university falls short of this ideal, they agree that it is perfectible."[3]

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are founded upon the hope that the university is redeemable through tactics of representation, security, and inclusion of students, faculty, and staff from underrepresented groups. Tactics of representation include the recruitment and hiring of faculty of color, the recruitment and admission of students from underrepresented groups, diversification of the pipeline, diversification of the curriculum, and diversifying the syllabus. Tactics of security include diversity training, creating safe spaces, and developing processes for addressing incidents of racism. Tactics of equity might focus on pedagogical reform, attention to diverse learners, equity in pay and benefits, and initiatives to retain BIPOC students, faculty, and staff. Successful DEI work makes the university a less toxic environment so that BIPOC students, staff, and faculty do not (immediately) die on the vine.

Although projects of representation, security, and inclusion are good, they can result from misdiagnosing the symptoms as the disease. The disease is

[2] Koritha Mitchell, "Identifying White Mediocrity and Know-Your-Place Aggression: A Form of Self-Care," *African American Review* 51, no. 4 (2018): 253–62, doi:10.1353/afa.2018.0045.

[3] Robin D. G. Kelley, "Black Study, Black Struggle," *Boston Review*, March 7, 2016, http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

not primarily those obstacles of being a minority in a majority white institution; it is that the institution functions in accord with its design. Speaking from my experience working for diversity and inclusion efforts in universities and professional societies, DEI projects can serve to occlude racial stratification. Initiatives of inclusion often address the epiphenomena of the root problems structuring university institutions and education itself. A liberal vision of an antiracist campus falls short because it does nothing to address the ways in which the university is embedded in systems of oppression. Kelley explains, "The fully racialized social and epistemological architecture upon which the modern university is built cannot be radically transformed by 'simply' adding darker faces, safer spaces, better training, and a curriculum that acknowledges historical and contemporary oppressions. This is a bit like asking for more Black police officers as a strategy to curb state violence. We need more faculty of color, but integration alone is not enough."[4]

Nevertheless, people often imagine the university as an institution uniquely positioned for antiracism. The image of the university as an exceptional place remains. Universities hire exceptional faculty and staff, admit the best students, and are the loci of generation of knowledge. Academics in the humanities are especially tempted to describe a humanistic formation that is personally liberative and, therefore, uniquely positioned to champion the struggle against oppressive forces that stymie this liberation, including racism. In this view, education is personally liberative and serves as the gateway to (and gatekeeper of) economic mobility, standing apart from other institutions of government, policing, prisons, finance, and militarization. In this imaginary presentation and middle class aspiration, the intellectual, cultural, and financial emancipation of Black and brown people flows through this institution.

But the university's history speaks otherwise. Its provenance is in settler colonialism and slavery. Craig Steven Wilder writes, "Colleges were imperial instruments akin to armories and forts, a part of the colonial garrison with the specific responsibilities to train ministers and missionaries, and extend European rule over foreign nations. Christians launched their religious and educational mission to Native peoples from highly militarized spaces."[5] Land-grant universities were founded with the sale of eleven million acres stolen from "over 250 [Indigenous] tribes, bands, and communities through

[4] Kelley, "Black Study, Black Struggle."

[5] Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 33.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

over 160 violence-backed land cessions."[6] The 1862 Morrill Act, still in operation today, requires the states to hold the proceeds in "perpetual fund, the capital of which shall remain forever undiminished … and the interest of which shall be inviolably appropriated … to the endowment, support, and maintenance [of universities]."[7] Throughout the South, many universities were literally founded on lands that were formerly worked by slaves. In this context, the 1838 Jesuit Maryland Province sale of 272 slaves that financially stabilized Georgetown University and launched its ascendant trajectory was not an anomalous event. It is consistent with the projects of dispossession and enslavement that established and endowed universities in the United States. To dig into the history of our institution might consist of digging into its soil, where we would find unsettling archeological remnants.[8]

Beyond its linkages to historical injustice, the university has regenerated its patterns of enslavement and dispossession.[9] The contemporary university remains deeply invested in a racial regime by developing and certifying its human, institutional, and epistemological resources. The university is characterized, not by its immunity to external racism, but by its permeability to outside institutions and by its central role in solidifying racial and class stratification. Sandy Grande, Quechua author and Indigenous studies scholar, explains that the "initial dispossession and enslavement of Indigenous and Black peoples has given rise to a settler nation and attendant institutions that are *predisposed* to replicate relations of domination. As such, scholars of abolition and decolonization question the efficacy of liberal reform measures focused on diversity, inclusion and equity. Given that the university is at least 1,000 years old and still remains fundamentally defined by its constitutive dispossessions, enclosures and exclusions are its own testament to the failures of reform."[10]

[6] Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone, "Land-Grab Universities: Expropriated Indigenous Land Is the Foundation of the Land-Grant University System," *High Country News*, March 30, 2020, https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities.

[7] Morrill Act of July 2, 1862, Pub. L. 37–108, Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789–1996.

[8] For example, Edmund T. Gordon created the Racial Geography Tour of the University of Texas at Austin, which highlights the ways in which the land and buildings of the university are implicated in a history of race. See https://racialgeographytour.org.

[9] On the entanglement between the plantation of the past and the contemporary university, see Bianca C. Williams, Dian D. Squire, and Frank A. Tuitt, eds., *Plantation Politics and Campus Rebellions: Power, Diversity, and the Emancipatory Struggle in Higher Education* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2021).

[10] Sandy Grande, "Life Beyond Evidence: Hospicing the University" (keynote address, Conference of Ford Fellows, remote, October 9, 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Consider the ways in which inequality is embedded in the practices of funding education, delivering education, and its outcomes:

- *The disparity of resources among higher education institutions is almost too great to be imagined.* Heinz-Dieter Meyer and Kai Zhou show that in 2013, the thirty-five universities in the United States with the highest endowments held 54.5 percent of the endowment funds of all higher education institutions in the United States (total of 4,724). The top seventy held 65.3 percent. The rest held 34.7 percent.[11] Indeed, the bottom 95 percent of all institutions are experiencing a decrease in their share of endowments. The endowment growth in just the 2016–2017 academic year of Harvard University was more than six billion, surpassing the total endowments of all but the highest endowed institutions. The results, they say, include an inflation of the cost of education and price gouging, the closing of institutions, the marginalization of the humanities, and the increasing disparities among institutions. These inequalities are driving the increasing college price tag for those who can least afford it.
- *Graduation rates are 20 percent lower for Black than for white students.*[12] The six-year graduation rate for Black and Latinx students is 51.5 percent while it is 70 percent for white students.
- *Higher education depends upon a system of debt that disadvantages BIPOC students.* According to a 2016 report by the US Department of Education, Black students are more likely to borrow for higher education than white students. They borrow at a higher rate than white students in both public and private universities, and they must incur more debt to receive the same degrees.[13]
- *Black students are more likely to drop out of college with debt.* Black students who drop out have a higher borrowing rate than white students

[11] Heinz-Dieter Meyer and Kai Zhou, "Autonomy or Oligarchy? The Changing Effects of University Endowments in Winner-Take-All Markets," *Higher Education* 73, no. 6 (2017), 839–40.

[12] National Center for Education Statistics, *2003–2004 Beginning Postsecondary Students, Longitudinal Study, Second Follow Up* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education, 2009). See Andrew Howard Nicholas and Marshall Anthony Jr., "Graduation Rates Don't Tell the Full Story: Racial Gaps in College Success Are Larger Than We Think," *The Educational Trust* (March 5, 2020), edtrust.org/resource/graduation-rates-dont-tell-the-full-story-racial-gaps-in-college-success-are-larger-than-we-think/.

[13] National Center for Education Statistics, *2003–2004 Beginning Postsecondary Students, Longitudinal Study, Second Follow Up.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

who drop out. Black students with debt are more likely to drop out than white students with debt.[14]

- *Black students who graduate suffer poorer outcomes.* On average, Black students have $25,000 more student debt than white students.[15] There remain racial disparities in debt burden even after graduation and socioeconomic differences are factored out, suggesting differences of opportunity in the job market following graduation.[16] This is suggested by the default rates: white college graduates default on debt during a 12-year period at rate of 5.2 percent; Black students default at a rate of 28 percent.[17] While all racial groups were affected by the economic downturn due to the pandemic, when employment rates improved, Black graduates saw no gains. April–May 2020 white graduates gained 900,000 jobs whereas Black graduates lost 200,000.[18]
- *BIPOC faculty and staff are often working in unbenefited or nontenured positions.* Recent increases in underrepresented minority faculty on campus have been driven by non-tenure-track and part-time appointments. The TIAA Institute shows that between 1993 and 2013, there was a modest growth of the numbers of "underrepresented minority" (URM) [not my preferred term] faculty in tenured (60.9 percent) and tenure-track positions (30.1 percent). During the same period, there was an immense growth of URM faculty in non-tenure full-time positions (142.9 percent) and part-time appointments (222.8 percent).[19]

[14] Mark Huelsman, *The Debt Divide: The Racial and Class Bias Behind the "New Normal" of Student Borrowing* (New York and Washington, DC: Demos, 2015), https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Mark-Debt%20divide%20Final%20%28SF%29.pdf.

[15] Judith Scott-Clayton and Jing Li, "Black-White Disparity in Student Loan Debt More Than Triples After Graduation" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2016), https://www.brookings.edu/research/black-white-disparity-in-student-loan-debt-more-than-triples-after-graduation/.

[16] Michal Grinstein-Weiss, Dana C. Perantie, Samuel H. Taylor, Shenyang Guo, and Ramesh Raghavan, "Racial Disparities in Education Debt Burden among Low- and Moderate-Income Households," *Children and Youth Services Review* 65 (2016): 166–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.04.010.

[17] Andrew Howard Nicholas and Marshall Anthony Jr., "Graduation Rates Don't Tell the Full Story: Racial Gaps in College Success Are Larger Than We Think," *The Educational Trust*, March 5, 2020, https://edtrust.org/resource/graduation-rates-dont-tell-the-full-story-racial-gaps-in-college-success-are-larger-than-we-think/.

[18] Tim Henderson, "Black Professionals Miss Out on Recent Job Gains," *Pew*, June 22, 2020, https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/06/22/black-professionals-miss-out-on-recent-job-gains.

[19] Martin J. Finkelstein, Valerie Martin Conley, and Jack H. Schuster, *Taking the Measure of Faculty Diversity* (New York: TIAA Institute, 2016), 8, https://www.tiaainstitute.org/sites/default/files/presentations/2017-02/taking_the_measure_of_faculty_diversity.pdf.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> In the form of the adjunct system, exploitation permeates the university. In sum, BIPOC faculty entered the university workforce at a moment of divestment in public education, furloughs, pay freezes, and through rapid expansion of unbenefited and adjunct positions.

These are just a few data points. Yet they are suggestive of an exploitative economic architecture of colleges and universities that affect BIPOC students and faculty acutely, though they affect whites to a lesser degree. Kelley puts it succinctly: "the neoliberal structuring of educational institutions" is consistent with a history of "dispossession, accumulation, and exclusion."[20] In the classroom, we can see the practical results: students who cannot keep up with their academics because they are working two or three jobs are taught by professors who are doing the same.

The university was established within the logics of slavery and dispossession, profiting from the slave trade and land appropriation. Colleges and universities were established and administrated by men who were slavers to form young men into masters. The sciences and theologies of white supremacy were systematized through the university, which also advanced racial ideals of civilization. They became the institutions through which Indigenous and Black people were transformed from supposed savagery and ignorance into citizens. Given the historical entanglements of the university with white supremacy and settler colonialism, vast contemporary inequalities of resources, and the extractive structure of financing postsecondary education, and the gatekeeping role of the university, the obstacles to antiracist education within the university are systemic. In this moment, to be included in the university is to be invited into an already racially stratified environment marked by exploitation and profound inequalities. The university—in its present form—cannot be antiracist.

An Education in Dispossession and Assimilation

My ancestor, Henry Ossian Flipper, was a Buffalo Soldier and an agent of settler colonialism. Born into slavery in Thomasville, Georgia, son of Isabella Buckhalter and Festus Flipper, a cobbler and craftsman, Henry learned to read from John F. Quarles, an enslaved mechanic. After the Civil War, his educational formation took place at the American Missionary Society college in Atlanta, the predecessor to Atlanta University. Among his teachers was Edmund Asa Ware, a Yale graduate. He entered the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1873, pursuing a specialization in

[20] Kelley, "Black Study, Black Struggle."

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

engineering. At West Point he faced exclusion and racism, which he attributed to lack of education on the part of the white cadets. But Henry believed if he manifested virtues, learning, and cultural refinement, racist ignorance would disappear. He embodied the ideals of an officer and a gentleman—determination, intelligence, patriotism, and discipline. In 1877 he became the first Black graduate of West Point and was commissioned as second lieutenant in the US Army. He would be ignominiously court martialed and expelled from the army in 1882, an event widely attributed to racism. For much of his life, he sought to clear his name from the shame of his court martial and expulsion; it was for him a black mark on the Black race. He was posthumously pardoned by President Bill Clinton in 1999.

Like most Buffalo Soldiers, Henry was sent to clear the West for the settlement of whites. I cannot find instances of anti-Indigenous attitudes in his letters and memoirs. But his work was thoroughly invested in the dispossession of Native Americans. According to accounts, he fought bravely in a particularly intense battle against the Apaches led by the Warm Springs Apache chief Bidu-ya (Victorio) (c. 1825–1880). This was the only time Henry saw battle. Yet his most important role as an agent of settler colonialism was as an army and civilian engineer: constructing roads and telegraph lines, surveying tracts of land. After separating from the army, Henry took up engineering, legal consulting, and oil and mineral extraction in the Southwest for the US government and private companies. His fluency in Spanish enabled him to work on either side of the border and in Venezuela. He helped to establish new legal and economic conditions that would forcibly remove people from their soil. Henry transformed earth into property and mineral wealth.

For several years, I have been thinking about Henry's story and the risks of education. He envisioned education as the path to the advancement of Black people. He largely interiorized the humanistic ideals and the formation of the military academy, proving himself the intellectual equal of white men at West Point. And he sought a new freedom on the racial frontiers of the Southwest. His successes, he believed, were evidence of racial equality. Yet, he never seemed to connect the racism he faced in the military with his role in the US government's Indian removal policies. The tragedy was that Henry labored for the establishment of an economic and social system in which Black people would not be fully included and that would function to displace Indigenous people. The costs of his work were assimilation and dispossession, twin pillars of racial hierarchy.[21]

[21] Settler colonialism has not ended. Its structures remain clearly recognizable within our political, economic, and educational institutions. For the Apaches, this dispossession has

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As an educator, I, too, am entangled inside an education in dispossession and assimilation. One might hope that, despite its history of white supremacy and contemporary inequality, university education might be emancipatory. Mission-oriented liberal arts colleges and historically religious colleges often articulate higher ideals of a liberal arts education: formation of democratic citizenry, innovation, creativity, solidarity. We must be realistic about whether the university is really an apt vehicle for these ideals. The university primarily serves "regimes of professionalization" tied to securing order, corporatization, militarization, and war.[22] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten say "The Universitas is always a state/State strategy."[23] In other words, higher education transforms human beings into professionals who advance the ends of the state while wrapping them in benevolent ideals. It has from its very beginnings in the Americas.

The first university in the Americas, Universidad San Marcos de Lima, was founded by royal decree on May 12, 1551, by Emperor Carlos I of Spain. Captain Jerónimo de Aliaga Ramírez (1508–1569), a conquistador in the battle for Cusco (1533) who was later charged with oversight of Spanish extraction of precious metals, petitioned the emperor for the foundation of a university. De Aliaga argued that without a university the distance between Spain and this remote region could not be bridged, and the descendants of the Spanish and Indigenous people would remain in ignorance.[24] He wanted a university whose degrees would carry the same recognition as that of the Universidad de Salamanca in Spain. Fray Tómas de San Martín (1482–1554), the first Dominican provincial in Peru, proposed a curricular program, "Proyecto de un Estudio General," modeled on the curriculum of Universidad de Salamanca. In its first years, it would offer grammar, Indigenous languages, philosophy, theology, canon law, and medicine in imitation of the early modern center of scholastic learning in Salamanca. Tómas de San Martín

been continual. Today, the San Carlos Apache people are fighting to prevent the transfer of land at Chi'chil Bildagoteel (Oak Flat in Arizona) to the Rio Tinto corporation. The land, guaranteed to the Apaches by an 1852 treaty, is a sacred site, the home to Apache spirits, Indigenous burial sites, and the site of many ceremonies. The US government has cleared the way for Rio Tinto to excavate copper, an element critical for the renewable energy economy. The block caving method of excavation will inevitably cause subsidence: the surface land will collapse into a hole two miles wide and one thousand feet deep.

[22] Kelley, "Black Study, Black Struggle."

[23] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe and New York and Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 32.

[24] *Libro Tres de Cabildos de Esta Civudad de los Reyes*, parte III (1548–1553), Biblioteca y Archivo Histórico Municipal de Lima, http://www.biblioteca.munlima.gob.pe/index.php/biblioteca-virtual/libros-de-cabildo.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and Jerónimo de Aliaga desired the transference of the program of studies of Salamanca without change across space. Like the mining operations, the program of learning and the program of salvation was established within a colonial economic exchange.

In its intellectual and economic operations, Universidad de San Marcos served colonizing ends. Emperor Carlos I of Spain issued the *cédula real* in same year in which Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda debated the humanity and rights of Indigenous peoples encountered in the Americas in the Valladolid courts. Tómas de San Martín corresponded with Las Casas and, like Las Casas, Tómas was a defender of Indigenous rights and opposed the encomienda system. Despite these liberal ideals, the university was dependent upon systems of forced Indigenous labor, justified by the Spanish as an exchange for the benefits received by Spain, primarily the Catholic faith. Yet, due to the already-collapsing Indigenous populations, the support for the university was unstable. One commentator bluntly states, "The income was unstable, being income from the encomiendas and rapartimientos: and when the Indians died off, the fund died, too."[25] Universidad San Marcos was founded at the moment of a devastating epidemic and invasion. It was funded by the labor of Indigenous people whose populations were dying. Moreover, its curriculum—lifted from Salamanca and placed in Lima—served the ends of erasure. Its imported wisdom in a foreign tongue was deployed to replace the remnants of Indigenous wisdom, economy, and life ways and to reorient all Indigenous life to the purposes of Spain. And the human relationship to the land in an extractive economy became the model for the formation and education of persons.

Haitian priest Gérard Bissainthe, in *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent* (1956), speaks of a phenomenon whereby the gaze of the colonizer over the land was united with Christian formation. The "scramble for Africa" supplied a colonial determination of the riches of African land, structuring all life around the planting and excavation of those riches. Bissainthe described colonization as producing a gaze that failed to recognize the authentic riches of African life. He wrote, just as the land was "stripped [dépouillées] … the Black, to access this [Western European] perfection, to evolve, must be stripped of all that is Black and be clothed as a new man created according to the spirit of Europe."[26] Educational institutions, including those for the formation of

[25] S. L. Millard Rosenberg, *La Universidad de San Marcos de Lima Durante la Colonización Española (Datos para su Historia)* (Madrid: Imprenta Juan Bravo, 1933) in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 14, no. 3 (August 1934): 344.

[26] Gérard Bissainthe, "Catholicise et indigénisme religieux," in *Des Pretres noirs s'interrogent*, Albert Abble, ed. (Paris: Cerf, 1956), 120.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

priests, were colonial institutions. Theological institutions gave themselves the role of assessing authentic goods and truth in African cultures to determine what raw materials needed to be destroyed and which were to be integrated into the theological economy. The formation of Catholic priests of African descent, Bissainthe suggested, operated upon an educational and pastoral model of dispossession: the priest must interiorize the despoilation of the land. Colonized education, therefore, *requires* a restriction of our gaze of what is beautiful, good, and true to the requisites of the colonial economy.

In his insightful essays on pedagogy, Willie James Jennings, like Bissainthe, describes an educational formation derived from dispossession. He writes, "Pastoral control of land and space joined pastoral control of bodies in the colonial logic of Christian settlers to the new worlds to birth a vision of education that is both policing and assimilationist. If one resisted this vision, one was narrated as disobedient, already bound in and toward criminality. If one yielded then one entered a world of evaluation within which peoples were introduced to those tortured calculations we know so well, of cultural allegiance or betrayal, cultural authenticity or inauthenticity, of being temporarily aligned with uplift and advancement or being seen as backward and underdeveloped."[27] Jennings observes that the parallel and intertwined advancement of Christian mission with colonization resulted in a "pedagogical imperialism" that remains with us today. "Pedagogical imperialism" channels thinking, affection, desire, and judgment toward the authority of white bodies.[28] Our education tends toward the reproduction of subjects who are masters of dispossession and have interiorized their own dispossession. Despite the tendency of the university to reproduce its pathologies, Jennings is hopeful that—given institutions are people—they may be reshaped and reborn.

It is precisely my fear that to be included in the university is to be invited into an epistemic architecture and personal formation that blinds one to its coloniality and antiblackness. And their liberal, multicultural ideals often serve to occlude their racism. Speaking to the current moment, Nelson Maldonado-Torres explains that the university often advances an ideology of "all lives matter":

[27] Willie James Jennings, "Where Violence Lives: Notes for a Pedagogy of Aftermath," *Religious Education* 110, no. 4 (2015): 378, doi: 10.1080/00344087.2015.1063961378.

[28] Jennings, "Where Violence Lives," 377–79.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> After Emancipation, the Civil Rights Struggle, the Black Power movement, the work of the Combahee River Collective and many other efforts to address racism and antiblackness in the country we start the 21st century with the need to seriously consider a more basic claim: to recognize, simply, that Black lives matter. The simplicity of the statement, however, only increases its depth and significance. "Black lives matter" is a profound indictment, not only on the police, but on all democratic institutions that have assumed the responsibility of advancing the common good. This includes the university. That, today, we are called to acknowledge that "Black lives matter" indicates that "all lives matter" may not simply be a reactionary response to the Black Lives Matter movement, but the very conceptual basis of our liberal democracy, citizenship, the modern state, and perhaps especially, the liberal arts and sciences. If so, this may mean that both, modern nation-states and universities, have been able to reproduce antiblackness and racism while simultaneously shielding themselves from identifying it and addressing it effectively. Consider the massive results of this operation at the level of conceptualizing and institutionalizing disciplines, methods, pedagogy, required courses, hiring practices, and so many other areas.... it is crucially important that humanities scholars consider the extent to which the meaning of the very concept of the "human" in "Humanities" has been overdetermined or internally constituted by ideas, not only about the superiority of "Western civilization" and its categories for understanding the world, but also by "all lives matters-ism."[29]

Within the ostensibly universal norms, liberal ideals, and moral formation of academic life, the institutional reproduction of antiblackness remains implicit in the core anthropology of the university.

Pedagogy toward Refusal

The 2001 student protests against racial injustice at Pennsylvania State University illustrated that the university was not only unwilling, but also incapable of becoming antiracist. In 2000, racist emails were sent to Black students on campus. Black students began advocating for changes with the administration of Penn State, then led by President Graham Spanier (later removed from office for his involvement in the 2011 Penn State sexual abuse scandal). In 2001, LaKeisha Wolf, Black Student Union (BSU) president,

[29] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "The Humanities and the Liberal Arts in the Face of Black Lives Matter: Thinking Beyond Diversity and Inclusion," Statement from the Chair, Program of Comparative Literature, Rutgers University, New Brunswick (2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was sent a letter that contained a death threat and suggested that the author had killed a Black man on Mount Nittany, which overlooks the campus. Although no body was found on Mount Nittany, authorities later discovered the bodies of Black men in Bradford County, one hundred miles away, and Centre County, twenty miles away. BSU and allies, responding to the failure of Penn State to respond publicly or offer protection to Wolf, stormed the field during an annual football scrimmage, went to the center line, locked arms, and prayed. Twenty-six students were arrested. Although student protesters were still under arrest, university administrators planned the "No Hate at Penn State" march without their consultation.

The striking scene that unfolded at the march was captured on video by Penn State student Matthew J. Broussard in the documentary *The Village*.[30] When Ken Clarke of the Center for Religious Affairs at Penn State addressed the crowd with a speech citing Martin Luther King Jr., student protestors began to shout their displeasure and led a chant that drowned out the speaker. They demanded that LaKeisha Wolf be given the opportunity to speak. She took the microphone and passionately addressed the crowd: "I need to know. I need to know why, why I'm not treated with respect, why the image of the university has been put in front of my life. In front of my life! I dare anybody to cast a stone. No weapon against me shall prosper. In the name of God. In the name of God." Turning toward Spanier, a couple meters away and surrounded by security, she asked him if she could speak with him because her life was in danger. Spanier refused to look at her and did not respond. Neither did he respond to the subsequent demands by the Black Student Union leaders. Students then occupied the HUB-Robeson Center, organizing themselves to provide for student needs, entertainment, activism, and education. "The village," as the students called it, lasted a week, dissolving when Penn State met the demands of student activists on faculty hiring, scholarships, and empowerment of the office of equity. Wolf, however, believed that these steps by the university did not resolve the underlying problems.

If the inaction of Penn State revealed the racialized social ordering of university life, the student response proposed a mode of struggle against it. Students recognized in the "No Hate at Penn State" march a cooptation of their call for security and racial justice. The insincere overtures at inclusion and reform were intended to reestablish institutional equilibrium by sublating

[30] *The Village*, directed, produced, and edited by Matthew Joseph Broussard (Pennsylvania State University, 2001). See Matthew Joseph Broussard, "Understanding the Village: A Personal and Theoretical Analysis of the Documentary Film Production Process," (master's thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 2003).

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their protest. Wolf specified the root problem: the university's power to constitute itself socially was prioritized (and even mobilized) at the expense of her life. Not only did Penn State fail at inclusion but its intellectual and social formation obscured racialized violence. Black students had attacked the sacred symbols of that power—football—and rejected the university's form of inclusion through rejecting the "No Hate at Penn State" march. The student strategy—at least initially—was one of refusing the terms of inclusion offered to them. The threats against Black life can operate so profoundly within the university that refusal may be the only option.

I have increasingly recognized the limits of my own involvement with antiracist reform within the academy. Antiracism sanctioned by the university and scholarly organizations—confronting obstacles to inclusion and equitable access, programs on avoiding microaggressions, or introducing "diverse" subject matter into the curriculum—can risk domesticating movements for justice and fundamental change. Lucia Hulsether shows how between 1960 and 1975, Harvard Divinity School deflected student calls for the school to take action against racism by creating programs focused on religious pluralism.[31] Melissa Phruksachart explains, "Antiracism's historical entanglements and contemporary misadventures with liberalism are … 'official antiracisms'—palatable, dematerialized forms of antiracism sanctioned by the state, capital, and elite institutions that crowd out radical antiracisms that refuse to disentangle racism from capitalism, patriarchy, and settler colonialism."[32] The recent California State University system controversy over ethnic studies curricula highlights how projects placing Black, Latinx, and Indigenous knowledge at the center can be sidelined by liberal curricular initiatives focused on diversification. These institutionalized antiracisms can function to circumvent direct action and to reaffirm the power of whites within the institution over resources and the production, evaluation, and transference of knowledge. Sandy Grande puts it more strongly: "Reformist strategies are integral to the problem."[33] Antiracism must come from the outside.

In opposition to efforts aimed at recognition and inclusion in the university and academy, some Indigenous and Black educators suggest a different model for antiracism: *refusal*. Grande describes refusal as the rejection of a

[31] Lucia Hulsether, "The Grammar of Racism: Religious Pluralism and the Birth of the Interdisciplines," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86, no. 1 (March 2018): 1–41, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfx049.

[32] Melissa Phruksachart, "The Literature of White Liberalism," *Boston Review* (August 21, 2020), https://bostonreview.net/race/melissa-phruksachart-literature-white-liberalism.

[33] Sandy Grande, "Life Beyond Evidence."

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

violent or dehumanizing assimilation. She theorizes "refusal" as both a rejection of "the (false) promise of inclusion and other inducements of the settler state and an instantiation of Indigenous peoplehood."[34] Refusal contains both a negative and positive dynamic. First, refusal is a renunciation of inclusion offered on oppressive terms that leave in place unequal power relations. It resists an assimilation that shapes subjectivity and desire, individuates, despoils the subject of community and cultural bonds, and assesses the individual according to its norms. Grande claims that refusal is more than resistance because "it does not take authority as a given."[35] It is disobedience. It refuses to recognize the claim.

Second, there is a positive and creative dynamic in refusal. It is an act that is generative of a new way of being. Citing Herbert Marcuse, Grande states that simply existing can be a form of refusal in societies dominated by neoliberalism. Quoting Glen S. Coulthard, she states, "Taking into account the power relations of both capitalism and white supremacy, Indigenous scholars posit refusal as a positive stance that is 'less oriented around attaining an affirmative form of recognition … and more about critically reevaluating and redeploying culture and tradition in ways that seek to prefigure … a radical alternative to the structural and psycho-affective facets of colonial domination.'"[36] Looking beyond resistance—which operates in relationship to the authority of a current order of things—refusal aims to preserve and transmit different ways of knowing and being.

Beyond institutionalized antiracisms, there is emancipatory and decolonial education occurring outside the university or at its margins. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten refer to this as the "undercommons," that is, "where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still Black, still strong."[37] Instead of being content with inclusion within racist systems, Jack Halberstam says, "We refuse to ask for recognition and we want to take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls."[38] The undercommons of the university is

[34] Sandy Grande, "Refusing the University," in *Dissident Knowledge in Education*, eds. Marc Spooner and James McNinch (Saskatchewan: University of Regina Press, 2018), 107.

[35] Grande, "Refusing the University."

[36] Grande, "Refusing the University." Quoting Glen S. Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (2007): 456.

[37] Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 26

[38] Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons," in Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"the prophetic organization that works for the red and Black abolition!"[39] In the "undercommons," pedagogy is coextensive with the building of community.

If I read them correctly, womanist theologians and religious thinkers have frequently described this education in terms of *spaces* of healing, sanctification, and teaching. Diana L. Hayes, the pioneering Black Catholic scholar of religion, takes up the image of "the Clearing" in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The Clearing is the opening in the forest where the light shines through, where Baby Suggs gathers the community to preach the "gospel of love—love of self, love of neighbor—but most importantly love of their beautiful, Black bodies."[40] M. Shawn Copeland also references "the Clearing" as the space in which "rituals of healing and (re)sanctification of Black flesh sustain a redemption begun through emancipation."[41] Here, Black women exercise the role of healing the body, teaching, and passing on the tradition. The Clearing is imagined as a space in which another way of being-in-relation is possible and is beginning. It is a community that arises through the creative agency of Black women in the aftermath of being ripped from their people, land, and language to be pressed into slavery. The Clearing is not characterized as inclusion or recognition in a white-dominated society but the generation of new bonds. Hayes speaks poetically of "We [Black women] who now are rooted in another soil."[42] This is, quite directly, an appeal to a different ontology. She states, Black women have "forged new communities and new ways of being in the world."[43]

I am learning that while there is no easy disentanglement from dispossession and assimilation, this disentanglement might begin with a refusal. Honestly, I am not certain what form refusal takes within the university. But I am certain it must take shape at its edges, where teaching is coextensive with building a new community.

JOSEPH FLIPPER
Bellarmine University

[39] Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons," in Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 42.

[40] Diana L. Hayes, *Hagar's Daughters: Womanist Ways of Being in the World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 41.

[41] M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 51.

[42] Hayes, *Hagar's Daughters*, 15.

[43] Hayes, *Hagar's Daughters*, 20.

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